

*Leo Strauss*

*Machiavelli and Classical Literature*



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MY SUBJECT IS NOT "Machiavelli and Classical Antiquity." The subject "Machiavelli and Classical *Literature*" precedes in one sense the subject "Machiavelli and Classical Antiquity"; for Machiavelli knew of classical antiquity only—or almost only—through classical literature. Second, I shall limit myself as far as possible to Machiavelli's explicit references to classical literature. From the fact that Machiavelli's sentiment on a given subject agrees with the sentiment of a classical author or of classical authors, it does not follow that Machiavelli was guided in that point by the classics; the agreement may be a coincidence. Finally, I shall concentrate on Machiavelli's two *magna opera*, the *Prince* and the *Discourses*.

But it will not be amiss if we first cast a glance at some of his other prose writings. As for the *Florentine Histories*, it is irrelevant to my present purpose whether and to what extent that work imitates ancient historians. In the *Florentine Histories* Machiavelli refers very rarely to Florentine writers. He refers still more rarely to ancient writers; he does this, strictly speaking, only when he discusses the ancient origins of Florence; in this context he mentions Pliny, Frontinus, and Tacitus. In his eulogy of Cosimo de' Medici, when he speaks of Cosimo's love of literary men and in particular of Marsilio Ficino, he mentions Plato: Ficino was "the second father of Platonic philosophy." *The Art of War* is meant

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to bring about a renaissance—a rebirth—of the military art of the ancients, especially of the Romans. For this purpose Machiavelli uses the writings of the Roman military writers in the narrow sense (Frontinus, Vegetius) without, however, mentioning their names. This is in agreement with the fact that *The Art of War* is a dialogue between Fabrizio Colonna, an outstanding practitioner of the military art, and Cosimo, as well as some young Florentine gentlemen of great promise—a conversation that is supposed to have taken place in a garden of Cosimo's. He refers to *istoria nostra*, meaning the ancient Roman historians, but also to "*their* histories." The only ancient writers whom Machiavelli mentions in his work by name are Livy, Josephus, and Thucydides: he mentions Josephus and Thucydides once and Livy twice; in one of the two cases he even quotes Livy in Italian translation. The honor accorded to Livy, which is outstanding in the circumstances, does not surprise us: Machiavelli's *Discourses* are discourses on the first ten books of Livy.

I shall speak somewhat less briefly on *La Vita de Castruccio Castracani da Lucca*. For this graceful little work reveals Machiavelli's moral taste in a more direct or simple and more condensed manner than his great works. At the same time it reveals Machiavelli's relation to the two major trends or schools of classical moral or political thought with unusual explicitness. I cannot show this without going beyond the limits that I set for myself in this paper, but this flagrant transgression will be tacitly justified by the sequel.

Castruccio is presented by Machiavelli as the greatest man of post-classical times: he would have surpassed Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, and Scipio had he been born in antiquity. He lived forty-four years, like Philip and Scipio. He surpassed Philip and Scipio because he rose to greatness from "a low and obscure beginning and birth." He resembled the men of the first rank who either were all exposed to wild beasts or else had fathers so contemptible

that they made themselves sons of Jupiter or of some other god. Having been found as a baby by the sister of a priest in her garden, he was raised by her and her brother and destined for the priesthood. But as soon as he was fourteen years old, he left the ecclesiastical books and turned to arms. He found favor in the eyes of the most distinguished man of the city, a Ghibelline *condottiere*, who took him into his house and educated him as a soldier. In the shortest time Castruccio became a perfect gentleman, distinguishing himself by his prudence, his grace, and his courage. When on the point of dying his master made him the tutor of his young son and the guardian of his property, Castruccio had no choice but to make himself the ruler of his city. He won brilliant victories, rose to be the leader of the Tuscan and Lombard Ghibellines, and eventually almost became prince of Tuscany. He never married lest love of his children prevent him from showing due gratitude to the blood of his benefactor. After having described Castruccio's beginning, life, and death, Machiavelli devotes half a page to a description of his character and thereafter more than three pages to a collection of witty remarks made by Castruccio or listened to by him. These sayings reveal to us Castruccio's mind. There are altogether thirty-four such sayings. Almost all—thirty-one—can be traced to Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Famous Philosophers*. Needless to say, Machiavelli does not mention Diogenes Laertius nor the philosophers whose sayings he borrows and adapts to his purpose. This silence agrees with the fact that he very rarely refers to philosophy and philosophers: in the *Prince* and the *Discourses* taken together, there occur only one reference to Aristotle and one to Plato. Of the sayings reproduced at the end of the *Castruccio*, a single one stems from Aristotle. The Aristotelian saying is surrounded on each side by two sayings of a certain Bion. Bion was a pupil of the notorious atheist Theodorus and was himself a man of many wiles, a sophist of many colors, and so shameless as to behave like

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an atheist in the company of his fellows. The five sayings referred to are surrounded on one side by fifteen sayings of the Cyrenaic Aristippus and on the other by eleven sayings of the Cynic Diogenes. Aristippus and Diogenes shared an extreme contempt for convention as opposed to nature. The mind of Machiavelli's exemplary prince, as revealed by the witty remarks made by or listened to by that prince, reminds us most strongly of such undignified philosophers as Aristippus and Diogenes and hardly at all of Aristotle. These sayings reveal in an ironical manner Machiavelli's own innermost thought: they point to a thought at the center of which Aristotle is kept in bonds or overwhelmed by Bion, and of which the periphery consists of a shocking moral teaching. We could and, I believe, we should interpret this pointer as follows: Machiavelli breaks with the Great Tradition of moral and political philosophy, the tradition founded by Socrates and culminating in the work of Aristotle; he breaks with the tradition according to which there is *natural* right. Instead he opts for the classical alternative, for the view that all right is conventional. In contradistinction to Aristippus and Diogenes, Machiavelli is a *political* philosopher, a man concerned with the good society; but he understands the good society by starting from the conventionalist assumption, from the premise of extreme individualism: man is not by nature political, man is not by nature directed toward political society. Machiavelli achieves a synthesis of the two classical traditions. He achieves that synthesis by going over to a new plane from the plane on which all classical thought moved. To use what is almost his own expression, he discovered a new continent different from the only continent that was known prior to him.

We are now prepared to consider the *Prince* to the extent to which this is possible in our present discussion. From the dedicatory Epistle we learn three things: Machiavelli's knowledge of the actions of great men stems from a long experience of modern things and a continuous reading of

ancient things; the *Prince* contains within the briefest compass everything Machiavelli knows; that knowledge concerns the nature of princes and the rules of princely government. Machiavelli calls the *Prince* a treatise. It is at the same time a tract for the time: it prepares the eloquent appeal, in which it culminates or with which it ends, addressed to a contemporary Italian prince to liberate Italy from the foreigners who have overrun her. Yet while the work is devoted at least at first glance to the preparation of action in contemporary Italy, it is animated and even guided by admiration for antiquity: in order to act well, the moderns must imitate the ancients. All the chapter headings are in Latin. In a sense the climax of the work is reached in Chapter 6, which is devoted to the new principalities that are acquired by one's own arms and virtue. In that chapter Machiavelli adduces the greatest examples which adumbrate the highest goal of imitation that is possible, the examples of Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus. Despite the mention of Moses and Cyrus, the emphasis is altogether on classical antiquity. Machiavelli refers only once to the Bible, to what, as he says, is an allegory occurring in the Old Testament; but he never *quotes* the Bible. He refers once to the ancient histories, twice to the writers, once to the ancient writers, and once to the histories, meaning in all cases classical writers. He quotes four times Latin prose writers—Justinus and Tacitus each once, and Livy twice, without however mentioning their names. He once quotes Virgil explicitly, just as he once quotes explicitly from an Italian poem by Petrarch. As for Cyrus, one of the four greatest examples, he is the Cyrus described by Xenophon. The emphatic reference to Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* occurs immediately before the most famous chapter of the *Prince*—Chapter 15—in which Machiavelli states the program of his political philosophy, a political philosophy radically opposed to the great tradition of political philosophy. He intends, he says, to write something useful, and therefore

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he will speak of the "factual verity of the matter" as distinguished from the imagination thereof. For many have imagined republics and principalities which were never seen or known truly to exist. The reason is that those many have taken their bearings by how one ought to live; Machiavelli will take his bearings by how men do live. The polemic is primarily directed against the philosophers—that is, Plato and Aristotle—although it is probably also directed against the kingdom of God. At any rate Machiavelli indicates here, with a lucidity and precision that have never been surpassed, the radical opposition of his political philosophy to classical political philosophy and the ground of that opposition. Yet this challenge or provocation is immediately preceded by his approval of the teaching of one of the classical philosophers, Xenophon. Xenophon is of unique importance to Machiavelli: he mentions Xenophon in the *Prince* and the *Discourses* more frequently than he does Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero taken together. Is this an accident or is it deliberate?

To answer this question, we must first understand the peculiarity of Xenophon. Machiavelli mentions, and refers approvingly to, two writings of Xenophon, the *Education of Cyrus* and the *Hiero*. In the *Education of Cyrus* Xenophon presents a dialogue between Cyrus and his father by which Cyrus is initiated into politico-military morality. Cyrus learns from his gentlemanly father to his shock—a shock which he quickly overcomes—that the common rules of justice apply only to relations among fellow citizens, or at any rate do not apply to one's relations to foreign enemies. But as Machiavelli makes clear, the lesson taught by Xenophon in the *Education of Cyrus* is broader than the one explicitly stated by Xenophon; force and fraud, but especially fraud, are indispensable not only for defeating foreign enemies but also for overcoming resistance to establishing oneself as absolute ruler within one's own community. The *Hiero* is a dialogue between a wise man and a tyrant. The tyrant is, or pretends to be, most unhappy as a consequence of his being

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a tyrant. The wise man shows him that he would become most happy if he were to become the benefactor of his subjects. This means, in the context, that a man who has become the ruler of his city through having committed innumerable crimes of the gravest kinds can be very happy if he uses his power thus acquired for benefiting his subjects. We regard Xenophon, then, as the classical thinker who more than any other paved the way for Machiavelli. We deny therewith that the men known as sophists played that role. Not only is Machiavelli in this respect completely silent about the sophists and in particular about the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians in Thucydides which is frequently taken as a document of sophistic thought, but according to the judgment of a most competent man—Aristotle—what is characteristic of the sophists is not the teaching that might makes right but the identification or near-identification of the political art with rhetoric. In accordance with this, Xenophon presents a pupil of Gorgias as a general quite able to command gentlemen, men who can be swayed by speech, but wholly unable to get himself obeyed by non-gentlemen; Xenophon presents himself as capable of ruling both kinds of man: Xenophon, a pupil of Socrates, can do what the pupil of Gorgias cannot do because, being a pupil of Socrates, he does not believe in the omnipotence or quasi-omnipotence of speech but knows that men can be ruled only by a mixture of persuasion and coercion, a mixture of a certain kind of speech and of the application of brachial power. It almost goes without saying that Xenophon is not a Machiavellian *avant la lettre*: Xenophon's moral universe has two poles, the one pointed to by the great political man, say, by Cyrus, and the other pointed to by Xenophon's revered master, Socrates. But there is no place for Socrates in Machiavelli's moral universe. In order to arrive at Machiavelli's thought by starting from Xenophon, one must effect a radical break with Socratic thought, one must discover a new moral continent.

The *Discourses* combines—as does the *Prince*, but in a

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different manner, in a different key—the imitation of antiquity, the docile listening to what the ancient writers say, with a setting forth of wholly new modes and orders, with what is in fact a complete break with classical political philosophy. That the *Discourses* is meant to prepare the rebirth of the spirit of antiquity appears from its title: *Discourses on the First Decade of Livy*. That it sets forth something wholly new appears from the prooemium: the allusion to Machiavelli's being the Columbus of the moral world occurs in that prooemium. Whereas the chapter headings of the *Prince* are all in Latin, those of the *Discourses* are all in the vulgar tongue. To begin with, one can find the reconciliation of the two disparate tendencies in Machiavelli's desire to bring to light and life the institutions and the spirit of the Roman republic: those institutions and that spirit are wholly new compared with the institutions and the spirit obtaining now. This solution of the riddle of the *Discourses* is as sound and as unsound as the view that, whereas the *Prince* deals with princely government, the *Discourses* deals with republican government. These views are sound since they are based on explicit utterances of Machiavelli; they are unsound because they do not take account of other explicit utterances of Machiavelli and, above all, of what he is doing in both works.

The *Discourses* is much more difficult to understand than the *Prince*. A clear sign of this is that the *Prince* has a much more lucid plan and structure than the *Discourses*. The reason seems to be that in the *Discourses* Machiavelli follows two different plans: his own plan, of which there are quite a few indications, and the plan imposed on him by the sequence of the Livian stories. Closer study shows that Machiavelli's own plan (which does not become sufficiently clear from his explicit indications) and not the Livian order controls all his uses, his selection of Livian passages. Even when he seems merely to follow the Livian order, there is a Machiavellian reason for it. It is wise to assume, at least

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to begin with, that Machiavelli's lucid and orderly mind did not forsake him when he laid down the plan of the *Discourses*. In order to discover the reason for that plan, one must among other things watch carefully his use and non-use of Livy and the various ways in which he uses him. By his use of Livy I understand primarily his explicit use of him. That explicit use consists in explicit quotations from Livy in Latin, in implicit Latin quotations, in explicit references to Livy without quotation, and in implicit but unmistakable reference to him like "*questo testo*" or "*la istoria*." One could, of course, say that Machiavelli sometimes uses Livian material while being completely silent about its origin or even by suppressing Livian stories. But his use of Livy in this broad sense could be established in a sufficient manner only if we could read the whole work of Livy with Machiavelli's eyes, i.e., if we possessed a degree of penetration which, if we are wise, we will not claim to possess. But everyone can see easily whether Machiavelli refers or does not refer to Livy.

In order to understand the relation of Machiavelli's plan to the Livian order, one must first grasp the difference between his intention and that of Livy. Machiavelli speaks of this difference only in a very advanced part of his argument. In II,31 ("How dangerous it is to believe exiles") he refers to an example adduced by Livy which is foreign to Livy's purpose: it is not foreign to Machiavelli's purpose. It is foreign to Livy's purpose because it is not a Roman example. Machiavelli's purpose is not simply Roman. He wishes to incite his readers to imitate the virtue of the republican Romans. *The* historian of the Roman Republic in its incorrupt state is Livy. But Livy cannot teach us that the virtues celebrated by him can be imitated by modern man. One can say, and Machiavelli himself does say, that what was possible for man once is in principle possible for man at all times. But it would be more convincing if he could show by a large variety of examples that the ancient

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way of doing things was wise while the modern way is foolish, or that there were some modern men who did act as the ancients acted. The mere fact that Machiavelli writes as a modern for moderns implies that his intention differs from Livy's. Moreover, the general consideration referred to proves that the imitation of the ancients is physically possible, yet it does not prove that it is morally possible: the ancients were pagans, and the virtues of the pagans could be questioned as being merely resplendent vices. Machiavelli must therefore show that the virtues of the ancients were genuine virtues, and that the virtues extolled by the detractors of the ancients are not genuine; he must face and overcome a difficulty which did not exist for Livy.

We thus understand the character of the typical chapter of the *Discourses*; it deals with a Roman and a modern example. Yet by no means are all chapters typical. There are chapters which contain only ancient examples; there are chapters which contain only modern examples; there are chapters which contain only ancient examples, none of which is Roman; there are chapters which contain only ancient and Turkish examples.

A cursory reading of the *Discourses* as a whole could suggest that Machiavelli quotes a Livian statement in almost every chapter. Yet nothing would be further from the truth. Especially surprising is his procedure in the first half of the first book. In the first eleven chapters no quotation from Livy occurs; there follow four chapters containing altogether four Livy quotations, and thereafter twenty-four chapters containing no Livy quotations. There is no parallel to this thrift in the rest of the work. By understanding his procedure in the first thirty-nine chapters, we arrive at a better understanding of the meaning of his use of Livy.

The group of chapters in which Machiavelli begins to quote Livy deals with the religion of the Romans. The first chapter containing a Livy quotation contains a passionate attack on the Roman church as responsible for the irreligion

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of the Italians and for the political weakness of Italy. The second chapter shows how the Romans—that is, the Roman nobility—used religion prudently for keeping the plebs in fear and obedience. The last chapter shows how “Roman virtue” overcame the intransigence which Rome’s enemies had acquired by “virtue of religion.” Just as the writers subject to the Roman caesars could not blame Caesar as the tyrant he was but instead praised Brutus, Machiavelli, being subject to the church, could not attack Christianity but extolled the religion of the pagan Romans. He uses the authority of Livy for counteracting the authority of the Bible. Livy’s history is his Bible.

In the whole *Prince* and *Discourses* there occurs a single quotation from the Bible. *Discourses* I,26 shows that a new prince in a city or country taken by him must make everything new; he must introduce new titles and new authorities and use new men; he must make the rich poor and the poor rich, as David did when he became king; *qui esurientes implevit bonis et divites dimisit inanes*, as Machiavelli quotes from the *Magnificat*. These manners of proceeding, he adds, are most cruel and inimical not only to every Christian way of life but even to every humane one as well. The full weight of this statement is felt only by those who remember what Machiavelli says at the end of the preceding chapter; he says there that the next chapter deals with what the authors call tyranny. The term tyrant is strictly avoided in the twenty-sixth chapter, just as it is in the whole *Prince*, which happens to consist of twenty-six chapters. King David was then a tyrant. Being a tyrant, he acted as God acts according to the *Magnificat*. It is repugnant to me to spell out fully the blasphemy which Machiavelli forces his reader to think.

I have spoken of the *authority* of Livy. I use this expression here in the fullest sense: Livy’s history is meant to take the place of the Bible. But the authority of Livy depends on, it presupposes, the authoritative character of ancient Rome. Only by establishing the authority of ancient Rome

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can Machiavelli establish the authority of Livy. From here we understand his procedure in the first six chapters of the *Discourses*. In the first chapter, which deals with the beginnings of cities in general and of Rome in particular, he bestows high praise on ancient Egypt, a political society which flourished "in the most ancient antiquity." That praise is altogether provisional; Machiavelli retracts it tacitly but unmistakably at the beginning of the second book. That is to say, at the beginning of the first book he acts on the principle according to which the old is good and hence the oldest is best: there is no need for any further proof of the bestness of the oldest except to show that it is in fact the oldest. But this implies that the goodness of ancient Rome, which does not belong to the most ancient antiquity, is in need of proof. That proof is given in the next five chapters. The second chapter deals with the various kinds of republics and in particular with the polity of Rome. Machiavelli raises the question of whether a simple or a mixed polity is to be preferred. The mixed regime is preferred by those who in the opinion of many are wiser than the believers in simple regimes: Machiavelli follows not simply the wiser man but those who *in the opinion of many* are the wiser men; he follows authority. The argument which he presents is in fact the one given by Polybius, but Machiavelli does not mention Polybius. Following Polybius, he speaks of the mixed regimes of Sparta and of Rome. Sparta received her polity at her beginning from a single man, Lycurgus; the Roman polity emerged accidentally as a consequence of the discord between the plebs and the Senate. This seems to show that the Spartan policy was superior to the Roman. That this is the case is indeed "the opinion of many." But, Machiavelli now dares to say, those many judge inconsiderately: the grave disorders in early Rome were the first cause of Roman liberty. Furthermore, Rome is distinguished from Sparta in that in Rome the guardianship of liberty was in the hands of the plebs while in Sparta it was in the hands

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of the nobility; the Spartan arrangement seems to be preferable, for in Sparta liberty lasted much longer than in Rome. A case can be made for both preferences. Machiavelli overcomes this embarrassment by making a distinction: the Spartan arrangement is best for a non-expansionist republic while the Roman is best for a republic which tends to become a great empire. Yet all human things are in motion and therefore the stability aimed at by Sparta is not in agreement with the nature of things and can be achieved only by lucky accident. In this way Machiavelli establishes the authority of Rome by demonstration; but in setting forth his decision he says four times *credo*. Has he then demonstrated the superiority of Rome to Sparta? Or has he merely shown that before the tribunal of unassisted reason the case for Rome is as strong as the case for Sparta, so that one is free to believe in the superiority of Rome? The fact that this discussion ends with a fourfold *credo* would seem to show that Machiavelli does not accept the superiority of Rome simply on rational grounds; in accepting the superiority of Rome he bows to authority.

In establishing the authority of Rome, Machiavelli criticizes certain critics of Rome but does not openly criticize any ancient writers in his own name. In the next section—the section which immediately precedes the section on religion, the section containing the first Livy quotations—he takes issue with the opinion “perhaps” held by “many” according to which Romulus is to be blamed for having murdered his brother Remus, that is, for having acted like Cain. He refutes that opinion by having recourse, not to any authority but to “a general rule,” without however saying whether that general rule is generally accepted. When in an earlier chapter he had attacked the opinion of “many” which condemned Rome for the discord between the plebs and the Senate, he had eventually referred to the authority of Cicero. But now, when the deed to be excused is no longer the shouting in the streets and the closing of shops, as

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it was in the earlier chapter, but murder, the murder of one's only brother, he does not betray any need for support by authority. Yet one could say that it is the authority of the divine founder of Rome which enables him to oppose to the false rule which unconditionally forbids murder the true rule which sanctions murder under certain circumstances.

A few words must be said about the second cluster of Livy quotations. Six such quotations occur in the chapter which opens the discussion of Decemvirate. In that discussion Machiavelli treats with complete neutrality the policies required for saving liberty and those required for establishing tyranny. In order to show how a potential tyrant can be successful, he studies the actions of Appius Claudius (according to him the founder of all public and private law in Rome), who failed in his attempt to establish tyranny and whose laws retained their force despite his ruin and violent death. This neutrality, which appears elsewhere in the *Discourses* as the height of political immorality and therefore as the height of immorality simply, is a heresy comparable in enormity to the neutrality between paganism and biblical religion, a neutrality revealed in connection with the first cluster of Livy quotations. Machiavelli could not have indicated more clearly than in this manner that Livy quotations as strands of his web are ominous rather than humanistic.

Machiavelli was compelled to establish the authority of Rome because the superiority of the Roman modes and orders to all others—for example, the Spartans—is not obvious or universally admitted. In that context he had to speak of certain alleged defects of Rome which he did not deny but which were in his view vindicated by the fact that they are the price one has to pay for the best modes and orders. The status of Rome is still more enhanced by the discourses which occur in the rest of the first half of the first book. Thereafter a fundamental change makes itself felt. Rather abruptly, if circumspectly, Machiavelli begins to criticize

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the Roman Republic even as it was in its most incorrupt period, and he goes on to do so though returning again and again to the praise of Rome. While defending the Roman institutions of dictatorship by means of "most evident reasons" against the opinion of "some writer" who had not "considered the matter well" and whose verdict "has been quite unreasonably believed," Machiavelli makes it clear that the Roman institution was not superior to a different Venetian institution which answered the same purpose equally well: the modes and orders of ancient Rome are not simply the model for the moderns. Thereafter he speaks explicitly, if with considerable euphemism, of "the defect" of the Roman agrarian law. That defect was caused in the last analysis by what, without the use of euphemism, would have to be called the avarice of the Roman nobility. It was owing to that avarice that Rome, in contrast to Sparta, did not comply with the basic rule that the public should be kept rich and all citizens be kept poor. In the context of this criticism Machiavelli refers to Livy by name for the first time since the end of the section on religion; Livy proves to be not only the celebrator of Rome but also her critic. Livy is no longer needed only for transmitting to modern man the counter-authority which enables Machiavelli to attack the established authority; from this point forward he is also needed to discredit that counter-authority. In other words, the authority is henceforth no longer the practice and policy of ancient Rome but Livy, a book; only from here on is Livy Machiavelli's Bible or his counterpart of the Bible. In the thirty-ninth chapter Machiavelli draws the decisive conclusion from his criticism of the Romans: diligent examination of things past enables one not only to foresee what will happen in every future republic if the necessary remedies used by the ancients are not applied in time but also to discover the proper remedies in case the ancients did not use or know them. Since the Roman modes and orders have been shown to be defective in more

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than one respect, we must conclude that, according to Machiavelli, a progress beyond the ancient modes and orders is necessary or that modes and orders which are wholly new must be sought. The fundamental reason why this is necessary is this: the ancient Roman polity was the work of chance, if of chance often wisely used; the ancient Romans discovered their modes and orders in response to accidents as they arose, and they clung to them out of reverence for the ancestral. Machiavelli, however, is the first to achieve the anatomy of the Roman republic and thus to understand thoroughly the virtues and the vices of that republic. Therefore he can teach his readers how a polity similar to the Roman and better than the Roman can be deliberately constructed. What hitherto has been a lucky accident, and therefore essentially defective, can become from now on, on the new continent discovered by Machiavelli, the goal of rational desire and action. It is for this reason that the modes and orders recommended by him, even those which he took over bodily from ancient Rome, are rightly described by him as new modes and orders.

At the beginning of the second book a new dimension of the problem comes to sight. After having defended Rome against a certain opinion held by "many" and in particular by Plutarch, "a most grave writer," Machiavelli shows that it was in the last analysis the Roman Republic which destroyed freedom for many centuries in the West. Immediately thereafter he suggests a revision of his earlier verdict on the relative merits of Rome and Sparta. Rome was enabled to destroy freedom in the West—the East never knew freedom—and to make herself mistress of the world because she liberally admitted foreigners to citizenship; Sparta, though a very well-armed republic with very good laws and less tumultuous than Rome, did not achieve Roman greatness because she was fearful lest admixture of new inhabitants corrupt her ancient customs. The Roman Republic, the greatest republic or the most political community that ever

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was, prepared the Western world for Eastern submissiveness and for the suppression of the supremacy of political or public life. The Roman Republic is on the one hand the direct opposite of the Christian Republic and on the other hand a cause of the latter and even the model for it. This is the ultimate reason why Machiavelli's judgment on Rome is ambiguous.

Machiavelli's questioning of the authority of Rome precedes and prepares his questioning of the authority of Livy. The first explicit attack on Livy occurs in the fifty-eighth chapter—that is, about twenty chapters after he had begun explicitly to criticize ancient Rome. But already in the forty-ninth chapter he grants that Livy's history may be defective in a certain point. In the same chapter, when speaking of Florence, he indicates that "true memory" of Florentine affairs is not available beyond a certain date. Could the possible defect of Livy's history be due to the fact that he did not have "true memory" of the event which he records in the passage referred to by Machiavelli? Certain it is that Livy himself speaks in that passage of the uncertainty regarding events which are remote in time. Earlier, Machiavelli had spoken of the things "which are read in the memories of ancient histories"; Livy's history, and certainly its first ten books, consist of such memories of ancient histories. But Machiavelli questions not only the simple reliability of Livian histories; he also questions Livy's selection of facts and his emphases. When he retells the story of the Decemvirate, he barely refers to the Virginia incident, which is told at such length by Livy, to say nothing of the fact that he does not mention that heinous crime when speaking of Appius Claudius' mistakes. On another occasion, when he quotes Livy's statements that the plebians had become "obedient," he makes him speak of the plebians having become "vile and weak." Machiavelli has been accused by a modern critic of completely distorting the meaning of Livy's stories and falsifying their spirit. This criticism

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is fully justified if it is meant to imply that Machiavelli did this with full clarity about what he was doing. He consciously uses Livy for his non-Livian purposes. He deliberately transforms the Roman ruling class as it was into a ruling class as, according to him, it should have been; he makes the Roman ruling class "better" than it was; he transforms a group whose best members were men of outstanding virtue and piety into a group whose best members, being perfectly free of vulgar prejudices, were guided exclusively by Machiavellian prudence that served the insatiable desire of each for eternal glory in this world.

Machiavelli uses Livy's work first as his counter-authority or counter-Bible; he tacitly replaces the doctrine of the Bible by the doctrine conveyed through Livy's history. Thereafter he explicitly questions the authority of Livy and thus draws our attention to what he had done tacitly in regard to the Bible. With some exaggeration one may say that he uses Livy as a *corpus vile* by means of which he can indicate how he had tacitly proceeded in regard to the *corpus nobilissimum*. This twofold use of Livy is related to the twofold character of pagan Rome which was both the enemy of the Christian church and the model for it.

Finally, Machiavelli questions authority as such or all authority. In the chapter preceding the section on religion he had said in praise of the Roman emperors from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius that the times when they ruled were the golden times when everyone could hold and defend whichever opinion he wished. Nine chapters later he says, quite casually as it might seem, that "it is good to reason about everything" whereas in the *Prince* he says that "one ought not to reason about Moses since he was a mere executor of the things which God commanded him," and that one ought not to reason about ecclesiastical principalities "for, since they are exalted and maintained by God, it would be the work of a presumptuous and temerarious man to discuss them." In this first chapter in which he takes issue with Livy (I, 58) he takes in fact issue with "all

writers." He says there: "I do not judge nor shall I ever judge it to be a defect to defend any opinion with reasons, provided one does not even wish to use in such defense either authority or force." He could not have stated more clearly and more gently the principle that only reason, as distinguished from authority, can command his assent. To reject authority on principle means to reject the equation of the good with the ancestral and hence of the best with the oldest; it means to derogate from the reverence for old men, the men most akin to the olden times. The first book of the *Discourses*, which almost opens with a praise of the most ancient antiquity, literally ends with a praise of the many Romans "who triumphed in their earliest youth." Machiavelli addresses his passionate and muted call to the young—to men whose prudence has not enfeebled their youthful vigor of mind, impetuosity, and audacity. Reason and youth and modernity rise up against authority, old age, and antiquity. In studying the *Discourses* we become the witnesses, and we cannot help becoming the moved witnesses, of the birth of the greatest of all youth movements: modern philosophy—a phenomenon which we know through seeing, as distinguished from reading, only in its decay, its state of deprivation, and its dotage.

It would be tedious if I were to read you the list of the twenty-one authors other than Livy to which Machiavelli refers in the *Discourses*. The author other than Livy to whom he refers most often is Xenophon. Next in order of frequency come Virgil, Tacitus, and Sallustius. Tacitus is the only writer an opinion of whom Machiavelli tries to "save" after having shown that it is not evidently correct. He alone receives such reverential treatment at Machiavelli's hands. We must leave it open whether this fact can be taken to mean that Machiavelli was the originator of the *Tacitismo* which in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played such a great role and can only with difficulty be distinguished from the Machiavellianism of the epoch.

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